

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Wednesday, July 27, 2005

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**STARK SPEAKS OUT AGAINST CAFTA**

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA, 13th) entered the following statement into the record in opposition to the upcoming vote on the U.S. - Central America – Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA):

“Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to H.R. 3045, the implementing legislation for the U.S. – Central America – Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). When big business calls, Republicans always answer, and today we vote on a gift to big business paid for by American and Central American workers.

“The signatory countries inked this agreement 14 months ago. CAFTA is so unpopular that the Republicans were unwilling to bring it up for a vote before the 2004 elections. Now we’re voting at the final hour with supporters relying on promised favors and twisted arms for victory. This is not the example we should be setting for growing democracies in Central America and around the world.

“Beyond the example we set globally, this agreement does not include basic labor, environmental and public health standards.

“Instead of forcing countries to meet basic environmental standards, the agreement allows them to enforce their own substandard environmental laws. If you have ever wanted to see the pristine beauty of the Costa Rican rain forest or Lake Atitlan in Guatemala you might want to book your tickets before the “benefits” of CAFTA begin to destroy these natural wonders.

“‘Enforce your own laws’ must be the favorite new saying in the Bush Administration because CAFTA applies this meaningless standard to labor rights as well. It would have been simple to require all CAFTA signatories to codify the International Labor Organization’s core labor standards. But the Bush Administration doesn’t care about workers rights as long as American companies have a cheap Central American labor pool to draw from. When Central American workers don’t have the right to organize, or even the right to a safe workplace, at least the Bush Administration can take solace in the fact that they have sent them low-paying jobs that used to belong to hard-working Americans.

“There are other egregious provisions in CAFTA, some written for Republican benefactors like the pharmaceutical industry. At the behest of PhRMA—the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association—the Bush Administration negotiated a sweet deal for brand name drugs that will limit CAFTA countries’ access to affordable generic alternatives.

“The pharmaceutical industry will solely benefit from a provision to extend its monopolies to Central America. If this agreement is approved, the most profitable industry on the planet will get an additional five years to exploit the sick to maximize profits. This provision will raise the price of drugs for CAFTA-country residents and could limit their ability to provide more affordable generic drugs during public health emergencies.

“In countries where people make two dollars a day, it is abhorrent to eliminate cheaper generics from the market and force workers to pay for expensive, brand name drugs.

“Instead of voting on CAFTA today, we should be telling the Bush Administration to renegotiate. This is a bad agreement for America and for Central America. I urge all my colleagues to ignore the Majority’s empty promises and arm-twisting and vote against this reprehensible free trade agreement.”